

# Home & Community Gardens

## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

**Purpose:** To focus on land cultivated to grow food collaboratively or individually, usually for consumption at home and not intended for sale.

### What's at Stake?

Food is one of our most basic needs and the ability to feed ourselves by growing our own food is aligned with the New Hampshire state motto “Live Free or Die.” Home and community gardens are vitally important to the character, lifestyle, and nutritional needs of all Granite Staters. Both types of gardening provide fresh fruits, vegetables, and animal products, while simultaneously connecting people to the educational, physical, social, and mental health benefits of gardening. People who grow their own food gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for their food— the benefits of fresh, local produce and the work required to get food from seed to table.

### Current Conditions

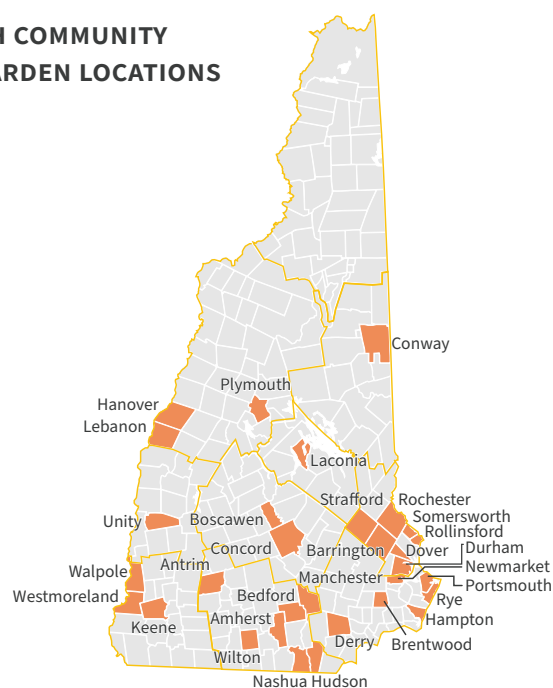
New Hampshire has seen increasing interest in local food, agriculture, and gardening, aligning with nationwide trends. A national survey predicted existing gardeners would spend more time and money planting and expanding their gardens in 2024, despite concerns about the economy and weather.

Home gardening is one way Granite Staters connect with their food, allowing them to find deep value and joy in the complexities of growing their own food for the benefits and experience it provides. Community gardens provide an opportunity for Granite Staters without access to land to build self-sufficiency, resilience, and food sovereignty. Currently, there is a gap in infrastructure throughout the state to support community gardens; support could fit within the mandate of an existing state department or agency but, currently, none handle the issue.

Without dedicated support from an organization or department, comprehensive information about community gardens is limited. At last count, there are 44 community gardens on the NH Community Garden

Map. Furthermore, there is very little data on how much food is produced by home and community gardeners.

#### NH COMMUNITY GARDEN LOCATIONS



# Challenges and Opportunities

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## CHALLENGES

- Beginning gardeners face an overwhelming amount of information, struggling with where to start and how to find New Hampshire-specific gardening information.
- Tools to help residents launch or find community gardens are outdated and often only available in English.
- Local land use regulations do not proactively support growing food. Agricultural Commissions only exist in a fraction of towns and focus on commercial agriculture.
- Food grown in home and community gardens is not tracked or included in data collection projects, like the NH Local Food Count, and therefore, cannot inform decision-making.
- Systems do not exist in local or state governments to support community gardens.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- The UNH Extension Yard & Garden Education Center provides education for home and community gardeners.
- The average yard size in New Hampshire is 1.09 acres, over double the national average. There is increasing interest in neighborhood-scale food production in New Hampshire's urban communities.
- UNH Extension's Master Gardener volunteers live across the state and have the skills, knowledge, and willingness to be involved with gardening projects.
- There are ample tools at the local level that support food-friendly regulations.
- There are many departments, agencies, boards, and commissions aligned with the goals and functions of a community garden, such as town Parks & Recreation departments.



# Recommendations

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- **Fund two, full-time UNH Extension positions focused on home and community gardens.** These two full-time equivalent (FTE) positions at UNH Extension will expand capacity for work in support of community and home gardeners, including support for the NH Master Gardeners Program and regularly updating the UNH Extension Community Garden Network and Map and “Community Gardening in New Hampshire,” a guide to launching community gardens.
- **Reserve open space land in conservation subdivisions for food production.** Encourage town planning boards to require conservation subdivisions to make open space land available for food production.
- **Stipulate open space land for food production in the Master Planning process.** In the Land Use section of the Master Planning process, ask towns to allow open space land, i.e. land not currently used or forested, like parks and fields, to be used for food production, including community gardens.
- **Research the amount of food grown by home and community gardens.** Conduct research to assess the amount of food grown in home and community gardens and identify the most pressing needs of home and community gardeners in New Hampshire, including how being involved with gardening affects food access, mental health, physical health, and community connections.
- **Propose state policy to legally protect gardening on leased land.** Introduce state legislation that creates built in legal protection for gardening on leased land by default (without extra permission), with expectations that tenants will return the garden space to the original condition when moving out.

# Authors

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**New Hampshire**  
*Department of Agriculture,  
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This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on [nhfoodalliance.org](https://nhfoodalliance.org) or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.